

Written testimony of Catherine Benner submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly H.B. 6659- An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2025

Submitted to members of the Appropriations Committee, Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice Chairs Exum and Hartley and Ranking Members Berthel and Nuccio.

My name is Cathie Benner. I live in West Hartford and am a member of Asylum Hill Congregational Church . I am also a member of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, or GHIAA. GHIAA is a network of over 50 diverse, interfaith congregations across the theological spectrum working together for justice.

I am testifying in support of a \$20 million dollar allocation over two years to community violence reduction efforts across the state. **This amount is necessary and will save lives.**

Street outreach programs such as Hartford Communities That Care, Mothers United Against Violence, and Compass Youth Collaborative are associated with up to 37 percent reductions in gun injuries. However, they suffer from a lack of funding sufficient to maximize the impact and effectiveness of their work. For this reason, GHIAA seeks funding from the state to support the vital work these organizations. Every dollar will contribute to **SAVING LIVES**. Yes, because of the existence and work of these organizations already in place, you as Connecticut leaders have the opportunity to appropriate the funds that are available to avoid the loss of countless lives that is brought about by gun violence.

I am a retired teacher and have seen the trauma that publicized episodes of gun violence has on kids. They are confused and scared—and looking to adults to protect them. I have also marched with Mothers United Against Violence when there is a vigil for a gun death in Hartford. The marchers, and particularly the residents feel real pain.

The Connecticut Commission on Community Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention launched in August of this year through the Department of Public Health, to distribute two million dollars for prevention and intervention organizations across the state. This is a positive step, but it is not enough.

The Commission is made up of experts in their fields, appointed to serve by legislation passed in the 2022 legislative session. These experts include trauma surgeons, street level intervention specialists, public health professionals and those who have lost loved ones to violence. In their report, submitted to the legislature in January of this year, the Commission recommended that \$20 million be available over three years to provide continuity of resources and support.

I am simply disheartened and even outraged by how much the horror of gun violence continues to permeate our lives. Even if we have not lost a loved one, we cannot help but to feel pain for the suffering of families that will never be the same, to say nothing of a life that is senselessly cut short. We can and have the moral and personal responsibility to do better.

Thank you.

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